

November 14, 2007 – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Montana Department of Livestock

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Department of Livestock Updates Trichomoniasis Testing Requirements

The Montana Department of Livestock (MDOL) has updated its rule on trichomoniasis testing for virgin bulls to allow for a one bull-one negative PCR test and eliminate the order which allowed one negative PCR only if testing the whole bull battery.

The new order still requires negative testing for all non-virgin bulls 12 months of age or older, and virgin bulls 25 months of age or older, before being sold, loaned or leased. All such bulls imported into the state must also be tested.

Additionally, a single PCR test can now be used in place of the previously accepted series of three negative cultures. The order also stipulates that no breeding can occur during the testing period, that all tested bulls must be individually identified – preferably by an official MDOL trichomoniasis testing tag – and that testing be documented with a test certificate from a veterinarian. The negative test is no longer valid after a bull commingles with cows.

The new order is less onerous for producers, said Dr. Jeanne Rankin, assistant state veterinarian, but is rigorous enough to protect the industry.

"Trichomoniasis is an economic nightmare for any rancher that has had cattle exposed to the disease," Rankin said. "We are updating the rule as testing technology for the disease improves. The single PCR test is just as sensitive as the three culture test. It will provide the same or better protection for producers with less time and harassment to the bull, in essence saving money."

However, the best way to diagnose the disease, Rankin said, is to test all of the bulls in a herd.

Bovine trichomoniasis is a sexually transmitted disease of cattle caused by a parasitic protozoan. Infection is usually not apparent in bulls, but can cause embryonic death and abortion in cows. Bulls generally remain persistently infected and are the main reservoir for the parasite, which affects all cattle but is more commonly found in beef herds. There is no known treatment for the disease, and bulls that test positive must be slaughtered. A vaccine for Trichomoniasis may help cows and heifers clear the infection and improve conception rates, but it does not prevent infection.

"Cows that are continually cycling during the breeding season or excessive numbers of open cows at pregnancy checking time are clues to a trichomoniasis problem," Rankin said. "Working with your veterinarian is critical to diagnosing Trich or any other reproductive diseases."

The new order (Official Order #07-02-D) updates the rule enacted in February 2006 and will remain in effect until amended. That rule made positive Trichomoniasis tests a reportable disease to the state veterinarian's office and required testing for all non-virgin bulls more than 12 months of age and all virgin bulls 25 months of age and older. Additional requirements included mandatory neighbor notification of positive bulls, and testing of those neighboring bulls.

Neighboring states – Idaho, North and South Dakota, and Wyoming – already require Trichomoniasis testing for imported bulls.

Rankin said the department will seek producer input before changing the permanent rule. A draft of the rule will be presented to livestock producers at a series of town meetings, she said, before a final version is written and opened for official public comment.

"We want to rewrite the rule next year to include additional requirements, make PCR testing updates and to add clarity," Rankin said.

Forty-three cases of trichomoniasis have been found in Montana since early April. Infected bulls have been found on the Rocky Boys and Blackfoot reservations, and in Teton, Park, Blaine, Pondera, Powder River and Cascade counties.

"The key to avoiding a trich problem is to buy only negative tested bulls, virgin bulls and no open, cull cows," Rankin said. "It has been a buyers-beware market, but mandatory testing should eliminate the potential for illegally selling a positive bull for re-breeding."

The USDA-Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service estimates that Trichomoniasis causes \$100 million in economic losses to the U.S. beef industry from reduced conception rates, lower weaning weight and increased culling.

For additional information on trichomoniasis testing, please contact your veterinarian or the Department of Livestock at 406/444-2043.

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